DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 219 290 SO 013 958

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TITLE Professional Culture: The Boundary Between Theory and Practice in Design. Revised Draft.
PUB DATE Jan 82
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (Los Angeles, CA, December 2-6, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; *Architecture; *Building Design; Culture Conflict; *Professional Training; Research Methodology; Social Science Research; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Theory into Action

ABSTRACT

This paper describes two research projects in the anthropology of landscape architecture design which show that "professional culture" restrictions often prevent anthropologists from putting their theories into practice. The first research project grew out of the author's assumption that landscape architecture students were not producing socially relevant designs because the information they had about the users was incorrect or inaccurate. The author analyzed the processes used by architecture students who had to define for the residents of a local urban neighborhood how an abandoned park could be revitalized to meet their needs. The students did not produce designs for a park that the community would like. The reason was not inadequate data, however, but the professionalization of the student. The qualitative methods of anthropology created a cultural description of what the community desired. The students, however, used books of landscape requirements and asked their faculty for assistance in developing their design. In the second research project the author did a content analysis of the journal "Landscape Architecture" to determine the dimensions of professional culture as a barrier to the integration of theory and practice. Journals from every fifth year from 1910 to the present were evaluated. The data did not describe a linear development of the field as expected. Instead the author found a congruence and interlocking of macro-societal processes and the development of the landscape architecture profession. The author concludes that as anthropologists move toward an increasingly active role among the applied social sciences, they must look for a metalevel of analysis that will aid them in their role as social and cultural translators. (RM)

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Professional Culture: The Boundary Between Theory and Practice in Design

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Presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Los Angeles, California; December 2-6, 1981

Revised draft. January, 1982. Please do not quote or copy.

SP013958

Introduction

Anthropology traditionally has held onto the academic values stance "that scientific knowledge requires a commitment to objectivity, honesty, accuracy and humility before the facts. But these values reflect a social position in society, the position of the institutionally supported scholar" (Rein 1980:362) and this value stance often comes under attack as the anthropologist moves to mission-oriented agencies to pursue applied research goals. Theory in social science is an intellectual framework for the interpretation of evidence and the meaning of fact shaped by the environment of the academic disciplines and the appropriate political ideologies (Rein 1980:360). Therefore, when scientifically determined academic theory doesn't work in an applied setting, the conflict is seen as a theory/practice conflict, an epistemological struggle of knowledge and action. The inability of social science to resolve this conflict is reflected in the intellectual separation of applied and academic professionals within disciplines. In the public arena, social science research programs in such areas as housing, family, and educations have faltered and social research funds subsequently have been cut. In response to my own inability to solve this schism, I began an applied research project on the anthropology of design and the profession of landscape architecture.

The research began with the simple assumption that the academic anthropologist often makes, that the reason landscape architecture students were not producing socially relevant designs was that the information they had about the users was incorrect or inaccurate; therefore, my first project was a study of neighborhood involvement in urban park design. At its conclusion, however, I learned that my "theory" was wrong, that the barrier to socially responsive design schemes was the professionalization of the student rather than the inadequacy of the data. The second attempt at understanding my theory/practice problem, then, was the examination of the professional culture in landscape architecture as a barrier to the integration of theory and practice.

The implication of the study of professional culture for anthropologists is that the discussion of theory/practice as a direct relationship is impossible, since the "theory" which we use for practice is a "cultural" framework as well. The analysis of theory and practice of applied problems must also include a metatheory level in which the actor's professional cultural framework conflicts with the lay or popular culture of the subject, complicated by the values, goals and objectives of the funding agency or institution. As anthropologists, we have been very perceptive about these relationships in the medical context of doctor-patient interaction and in the analysis of anthropologists as gatekeepers to various cultural groups. But we have not turned

our own analysis on anthropology as a "practicing discipline" with its own "professional culture." The development of professional culture separates the anthropologist from his/her subjects just as successfully as the professional culture of the landscape architect inhibits a popular culture design. It is a testimony to our cross-cultural method, however, that I rediscovered this intracultural conflict through the study of another profession.

The remainder of this paper will present the two research projects, a discussion of the research findings, and a conclusion based on the applications of this research for anthropology.

Background and Professional Culture

I should take a moment first, to define and explain my use of the term "professional culture." When I began this research it was my intention to study the "professionalization" of landscape architects in the process by which students are socialized into the value and ideological framework of design practice. I reviewed the major contributions of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933), Goode (1957), Wilensky (1964), Barber (1965), Vollmer and Mills (1966), Hall (1968), Parsons (1968), Friedson (1970), Moore (1970), Johnson (1972), Larsen (1977) and Unschuld (1979) searching for a composite scale or sequence. Instead of a coherent framework, however, I discovered tremendous theoretical disagreement and conceptual fragmentation, and rather than add yet another formulation to the disarray, I decided to reconsider my own anthropological conception of the problem. Following the suggestion of Greenwood

that all professions seem to possess a culture which "consists of its values, norms and symbols" (1957:16), and returning to Parsons' concept of a profession as some order of mastery of a generalized cultural tradition" (1968:536) I decided that the term "professional culture" was an accurate description of what many of the authors were actually discussing. The various characteristics of professionalization such as orientation, ideology, beliefs, knowledge, ethics, morality, and community are also dimensions of culture, and the use of the term professional culture does not restrict the concept to a developmental process, but does allow for the definition of cultural boundaries, intercultural interaction, specialized language, and behavior. The concept of professional culture clarified the complexity of issues in the discussion of professionalization and provided a broader framework which encouraged comparison with other professions and disciplines.

Research project one: Neighborhood Involvement in Urban Park Design [1]

The first research project in the anthropology of design grew out of my belief that better design could be accomplished if it incorporates an understanding of the public's needs and desires. An opportunity to test this idea was presented through a landscape design studio on an abandoned urban park in Camden, New Jersey. Farnham Park was first designed and built in 1904 as a classic, Olmstedian park in the then flourishing city of Camden for the workers of the Campbell Soup Company and

population moved to the New Jersey suburbs, the park also deteriorated, becoming a site for refuse and dumping, and unsafe for local inhabitants. The research problem was to define, for the residents of the local neighborhood, Parkside, and for the city and county of Camden, how this park could be revitalized to become a park congruent with the current community needs considering the specific opportunities, constraints, qualities of the site. This question was addressed through a research phase and program development, and responded to through a sketch plan and final park design.

The social investigation was organized around four data collection teams each assigned a different kind of analysis of the site and a list of research objectives:

Team 1. Demographic analysis:

a. Size and composition of present and future population

b. Analysis of economic, social and political structure

Team 2. Indirect analysis:

a. Past spatial behavior

b. Evidence of dysfunction related to locality

c. Content analysis

d. Literature search

Team 3. Direct Observation:

a. Movement patterns

b. Localized behavior

c. Specialized behaviors

d. Response to intervention

Team 4. Direct Communication:

a. Description of constituents

b. Spatial images

c. Temporal images

d. Current spatial behavior

e. Problem identification

f. Past memories

g. Predictions and preferences

In addition to these analytic tasks, each student kept fieldnotes and sketches of their reactions to their first encounter with the community. The collected data reflected a number of field techniques which generated a cultural description based on the reoccurring pattern of facts from each of the different methods. This redundancy of information, or trangulation

of measurement, obtained by a multimethod approach increased the confidence of the research results (Webb et al, 1966). Each team's discription of Farnham Park modified, corrected and ultimately combined with the results agreed upon by the entire group.

The demographic and indirect analysis produced a description of Parkside as a predominantly black neighborhood of 7348 persons with a mean income of $9,486, increasing violent crime and teen-age unemployment. The population of Parkside has grown 12%, increasing the number of school age children, while core services have decayed. About 50% of the surrounding housing units are over 60 years of age and about 55% are owner-occupied. (Low 1981)

The direct observation team collected data on the location of litter, intensive wear, user activities and movement, traffic (with a traffic count), hang-outs, landmarks and any other observable record of human use. These data were compiled into one map which was then used to locate problem areas. These observations were later combined with the interview data to produce a social use and constraints map for planning and design decisions.

The direct communication team produced two major contributions: 1) a set of resident profiles obtained from interview data, and 2) a series of before and after drawings and essays from children in the nearby elementary and middle schools. The interviews and drawings were organized to generate a matrix of observed, reported and desired park functions. Often these materials were accompanied by exact descriptions of resident perceptions of what a park should be and some indication of materials (such as lawns) and design

elements (swimming pools, picnic table and barbeques).

Program development from the social analysis and research phase was facilitated by a reorganization of the students into groups each representing the dominant values of the major social constituencies: the unemployed youths and teen-agers who use the roads for cruising and the basketball courts to hang out; the parkside residents who would like a nice, quiet picnic park; the school administration and teachers who would like a nature center and a controlled, educational environment; the young children and preteens who like to use the gym equipment, but who are afraid of the big kids; the city administration who will pay for park improvements; and the county administration who will control maintenance after the park has been renovated. Each group was asked to prepare a sketch plan that would reflect the values and interest of their constituents. These plans were presented to the class as a whole and then subjected to a group process aimed at selecting the points of agreement and generated a park plan arrived at through constituency consensus.

The design phase consisted of student translation of program elements and their research experience with the community into physical design proposals. I was fascinated by the variety of design responses; even though every student had the same data available and the same program, their responses were quite disparate. Some had basketball courts, snack bars, picnic tables, and tot lots

while others emphasized formal fountains, prominades and walk-ways reminiscent of the original Victorian park. It was at this point that I realized that the students lacked any concept of the aesthetics and taste of the community and that the detailed list of user needs and desires did not necessarily produce a park that the constituents would like or understand. The qualitative methods of anthropology created a cultural description of what the community desired, but the design program was interpreted by the students through their recently acquired professional vocabulary. Students used books of landscape requirements and asked their faculty to guide them to the appropriate design forms, but this professional guidance took them even farther away from their original community design goals.

I concluded that landscape values and perceptions are created by two kinds of culture, the professional culture of landscape architecture, and the popular or lay culture of communities, users and local groups. These "systems of standards for perception, believing, evaluating and acting" (Goodenough, 1981) are socially enacted in the complicated practitioner-client relationship, and in the professional-lay conflict over the control of knowledge, power and prestige. Professional culture is generated by the socializing pressure of accredited programs of landscape training, and influences values and perceptions through the rules of appropriate practice, aesthetic decisions and ideological identification. The

popular cultural perspective is maintained by the community rules of appropriate behavior sanctioned by gossip and social interaction which are shared by the local group. Conflict arises when the professional perspective of the practitioner excludes the public's cultural realm. The research illustrates how the problem of integrating social data into design practice can be understood as an intercultural conflict between these two groups.

Research project two: The History of Values and Ideology in Landscape Architecture

The second research project emerged from the first as an intensive investigation of the professional culture concept which explores the nature of the "cultural" boundary between the profession and the public. The method employed was the content analysis of the journal of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Landscape Architecture, from its inception in 1910 to the present. A code sheet of professional culture dimensions was developed that included: client sector (public/private); time orientation (past/future); mode of professional practice (solo/group, salary/ genealogy/educational status, professional/political ethics); ideology (intuition/scientific-analytic/egalitarian/elitist/ exploitative/ecology-conservation/preservation), values (functional/ formal aesthetic/informal aesthetic); knowledge base (fine arts/ gardening/architecture/city and town planning/forestry/engineering/ agriculture/regional planning/landscape architecture/ecology/social-behavioral sciences/technology); special language; tools, materials

and techniques (plants/hard surfaces/accessories/site planning); concerns and problems addressed (parks-recreation/residential/transportation/commercial-industrial/public spaces/reclamation/theory-philosophy). Three graduate students in landscape architecture[2] evaluated every fifth year of journal articles, book reviews and advertisements along these dimensions; the scores were totaled and compared across years to identify trends and abrupt shifts in direction. The analysis presented here reflects only the coded articles and book reviews.

The results, again, were not what I had expected. I had thought that a content analysis of the dimensions of professional culture would produce a linear progression of increasingly professional concerns, including a shift from private to public work from gardening to city planning and from an intuitive/artistic knowledge base and value system to one based on analytic and scientific procedures and data. The actual data, however, did not describe a cumulative nor a linear development of the field. In fact, the coded dimensions appeared to change in response to external societal concerns, rather than strictly professional ones. The state of political economy, as reflected in war and postwar periods, economic growth and recessions, and cycles of social optimism and conservatism best explain the variation of professional interests.

For example, the shifts from a future to a past orientation occur in 1925-40, remain in the future mode from 1945-1975 and return to the past in 1980. The shift from public to a private client occurs in 1935-1940 with the depression, in 1955 with a short-lived recession and again returns with our current economic stagnation in 1980. The changes in ideology and values also follow the economic trajectory beginning with functional/preservation concerns, shifting to formal aesthetics and intuitive design with periods of economic decline, andthen a strong shift to analytic-scientific and functional concerns during the post World War II period until the present. Across all categories, there was a return to a conservative, artistic, gardening dimension with increased concern for exploitative activities which would expand the profession in 1980.

Some areas remained constant or had a clear unidimensional outcome: education consistently was the basis of status, plants have been the dominant symbolic material, and the organization of practice was not an issue. Further, about 1955 there is a clear change that remains in the identification of landscape architecture as a knowledge base, and the appearance of professional ethics discussions.

I had hoped to use the content analysis of the Landscape Architecture journal as a method for distinguishing professional from lay cultural concerns, and in this way locate in time and ideology, the separation of aesthetic and political decisions. Instead of a separation, I found congruence and an interlocking of

macro-societal processes and the development of the landscape architecture profession. The examination of the political economy appears to be the clearest indicator of values and ideological change.

Discussion

These two research projects in the anthropology of design forced me to reconsider some of my assumptions about applied research and the theory/practice argument. I learned that:

1) the application of theory to practice is an indirect process in which the expected outcome may be replaced by a new theoretical premise, rather than the solution to the research problem.

2) the subject of a study may not be the true object of investigation, especially when the context, client and outcome are incompletely understood; and

3) anthropological theory and method must be employed at two levels in any analysis, at the action level of the information gathered and the knowledge obtained for a particular use, and at a "metalevel," as a running commentary on the macro-processes which are also in evidence, such as the fundamental conflict in professional and lay views of the world, or the importance of political economy in the development of an individual professional culture.

These insights gathered from research in landscape architecture also can be interpreted as a critique of applied anthropological theory and practice.

Applications to Anthropology

Anthropology has always had a "professional culture" in the academic sense of adhering to the rules and ethics of the scientific and humanistic disciplines. These rules and ethics protect the objectivity and reliability of our work for an academic audience and present a front of selective "impartiality" to those who use our conclusions. However, as we move toward an increasingly active role among the applied social sciences, i.e., as we move from a discipline to a "profession," new barriers to our clients/subjects/informants will form with our changing goals and objectives. Our "professional culture" restrictions will become more observable as we attempt to use our theories to aid one population, while being paid by another. These conflicts in theory/practice will become more complex as we enter the applied arena of multiple sponsorship. My research suggests that as anthropologists identify with a "professional stance," there will develop new barriers to their source of data, i.e., their access to the shared lay/cultural knowledge will change through their identification with professional goals. This presentation suggests that we address ourselves to these epistemological changes and look for a metalevel of analysis which will aid us in our role as social and cultural translators.

NOTES

1. This section of the paper draws upon the data presentation and conclusions previously reported in Low 1981.

2. I would like to thank Shirley Kessel, Ann James and Peta Raabe for their contributions as research assistants on the dimensions of professional culture in landscape architecture. This research was supported by the Center for Environmental Design and Planning of the University of Pennsylvania.

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